



Kitsap County Department of Human Services

Housing and Homelessness Division

September 2022

Kitsap County's response and strategies to homelessness and the housing crisis

Kitsap County's ongoing efforts to address a growing homeless and housing crisis, including challenging issues with unauthorized encampments on public property, focuses on a comprehensive response. County Commissioners and staff have developed a strategy leveraging community partnerships; the investment of local, state and federal funds; data gathering and reporting; and coordination of mental health, substance-abuse, and employment services. The goal is to support a housing crisis response system that makes homelessness rare, brief, and one-time.

Homeless encampment clean-up and prevention

Encampment Response Policy – In December 2021 County Commissioners approved a new Encampment Response Policy, outlining specific steps and coordination to govern the County's approach to addressing encampments on county public property. It specifically directs County departments, other public agencies, and community non-profit social service providers how to coordinate efforts in responding to encampments while adhering to current legal requirements.

HEART Coordinator – In April of 2022 the County hired a Homeless Encampment Action & Response Team (HEART) Coordinator, a new full-time position dedicated specifically to encampment response and responsible for implementing the response policy, coordinating groups and resources, and directing clean-up efforts. You can learn more about the HEART Program at <http://kcowa.us/HEART>

Encampment Outreach Team – The County is contracting with the Housing Solutions Center through Kitsap Community Resources for an additional two-person encampment outreach team to work closely with the HEART Coordinator, providing consistent and timely outreach to people living in encampments and other outdoor locations. The outreach team focuses on connecting people with shelter referrals, housing programs, and other resources.

Increased shelter beds – Since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, the County has continually supported an additional 150 emergency shelter beds, operated by the Kitsap Rescue Mission and the Salvation Army. This increased shelter bed capacity has provided more than 750 individuals with shelter during the pandemic. Funding to keep beds operational will continue through mid-2023 to provide accommodations as people are moved out of encampments and off the streets.

Emergency Motel Program – The County is contracting with Kitsap Community Resources for a new program to utilize motel rooms to expand the number of alternatives to immediately house people currently living outdoors who can't be accommodated with the limited shelter beds available. The program includes intensive case management and support services to assist people in moving from these brief hotel stays to permanent housing. The County also designated an additional \$2 million for rental and deposit assistance towards this effort.

Pacific Building Shelter Project – After purchasing a large building on Mile Hill Drive in South Kitsap, the County is working on renovations and expects to open the facility in 2023. The new shelter will provide 75 beds for 24/7 temporary housing with supportive services on-site for people staying in the housing program. Kitsap Rescue Mission will operate the site through a contract with the County. Services offered are anticipated to include meals, laundry, showers, mental health appointments, substance abuse treatment referrals, medical appointments, employment assistance, and connections with benefits. More information about this project is available at <https://kcowa.us/skhousing>

Permanent supportive housing – Recognizing that many people who are currently living in encampments need long-term housing assistance and permanent supportive services, the County (and many other funders and social service partners) is supporting Pendleton Place, a new 72-unit housing complex targeted to people with severe and persistent mental health and substance-use disorders that might otherwise be experiencing homelessness.

Job placement and development – Job development, training, and placement are provided through Olympic Workforce Development One Stop centers

Veterans Park restoration – An integrated effort with Kitsap County Parks, the Public Works Solid Waste Division, and the Department of Human Services to restore the 48-acre Kitsap County Veterans Memorial Park took place in March and April 2022. A Notice to Vacate posting was posted in March with a deadline of April 29, 2022, following the guidance in the Kitsap County Encampment Response Policy. People living in the park were offered alternatives such as shelters, hotel rooms, inpatient treatment, and transportation. The last person moved out of the park on April 29 and the HEART Coordinator continues to make weekly stops at the park to check for people that have moved back in and to let them know there is no camping allowed and to offer alternatives and services.

Partnering with the non-profit group Northwest Hospitality, 36 volunteers collected 35,000 pounds of trash and debris from Veterans Memorial Park. The County hired a clean-up and hauling company, Layland Construction, to supplement the volunteer work and haul away the waste. Layland Construction is experienced in cleaning up homeless encampments and has worked with Pierce County, the state Department of Transportation, and BNSF Railway on similar efforts. The company brought in a 10-person crew to complete the clean-up. Subsequently, the Parks Department has been working on restoration of the park.

Responding to Kitsap's housing crisis

Homelessness in Kitsap County – A Point-In-Time Count of people living homeless during a 24-hour period in February 2022 identified 563 people living without homes and local school districts reported 414 homeless children during the 2020-2021 school year. The County recognizes that in recent years the numbers of those living without homes has climbed due to multiple factors including the increased cost of housing, stagnant wages, a lack of affordable and available housing, and barriers that make it difficult for those who are displaced from housing to find new places to live.

The average rent has increased 40 percent in the last five years while at the same time, vacancy rates have dropped. The most common cause of homelessness was identified as eviction, health issues, and loss of job or the inability to work.

Preventing homelessness – Kitsap County’s housing crisis response is coordinated to increase housing stability by providing eviction prevention through rental and utility assistance, creating more temporary housing and lowering barriers for people to move into permanent, affordable, supportive housing.

Helping people stay in their homes is a vital part of Kitsap County’s strategy. During the pandemic, the [Kitsap Eviction Prevention Assistance Program](http://kcowa.us/KEPA) (<http://kcowa.us/KEPA>) distributed \$24.4 million to landlords and utilities companies to help keep people in their homes and an additional \$15 million is allocated through September 2023. From September 2020 through July 2022, more than 3,300 households were served with an average distribution of \$7,352 in rental assistance and utilities assistance per household provided to landlords and utilities companies.

Increasing affordable housing inventory – With the new affordable housing 1/10th of 1 percent sales tax Commissioners approved in January, the County can provide significant funding for the construction and acquisition of housing to support families and individuals whose income is below 60 percent of the area median income. This can also be used to leverage additional funding from state and federal governments. Collection of the tax began April 1, 2022. We anticipate the first distribution of funds in 2023.

To learn more about housing and homelessness and Kitsap County’s programs and partners or to find out how you can help those living homeless, visit the **Housing and Homelessness Division website**: <https://kcowa.us/housing>.

To find out about the **Kitsap Housing and Homelessness Coalition**, a network of more than 50 agencies working on homelessness, affordable housing, and poverty in our community, visit www.kitsaphhc.org

To volunteer with **Northwest Hospitality** work parties and their other homeless support efforts, visit nwhospitality.org.